

## Eleanor of Castile



**Born: 1241 SPAIN Married:  
King Edward I of England  
Died: 28 Nov 1290 ENG  
Parents: Ferdinand III of Castile & Johanna De Demarten**

### Information from Wikipedia and Ancestry.com

**Eleanor of Castile** (1241 – 28 November 1290) was the first queen consort of Edward I of England.

#### Birth

Eleanor was born in Castile, Spain, daughter of Saint Ferdinand, King of Castile and Leon and his second wife, Jeanne, Countess of Ponthieu. Her Castilian name, Leonor, became Alienor or Alianor in England, and Eleanor in modern English. She was the second of five children born to Fernando and Jeanne. Her elder brother Fernando was born in 1239/40, her younger brother Louis in 1242/43; two sons born after Louis died young. For the ceremonies in 1291 marking the first anniversary of Eleanor's death, 49 candlebearers were paid to walk in the public procession to commemorate each year of her life. This would date her birth to the year 1241. Since her parents were apart from each other for thirteen months while King Ferdinand conducted a military campaign in Andalusia from which he returned to the north of Spain only in February 1241, Eleanor was probably born toward the end of that year.

Prospective bride to Theobald II of Navarre

Eleanor's marriage in 1254 to the future Edward I of England was not the first marriage her family planned for her. The kings of Castile had long the flimsy claim to be paramount lords of the Kingdom of Navarre in the Pyrenees, and from 1250 Ferdinand III and his heir, Eleanor's half-brother Alfonso X of Castile, hoped she would marry Theobald II of Navarre. To avoid Castilian control, Margaret of Bourbon (mother to Theobald II) in 1252 allied with James I of Aragon instead, and as part of that treaty solemnly promised that Theobald would never marry Eleanor.

#### Marriage

Then, in 1252, Alfonso X resurrected another flimsy ancestral claims to the duchy of Gascony, in the south of Aquitaine, last possession of the Kings of England in France. Henry III of England swiftly countered Alfonso's claims with both diplomatic and military moves. Early in 1254 the two kings began to negotiate; after haggling over the financial provision for Eleanor, Henry and Alfonso agreed she would marry Henry's son Edward, and Alfonso would transfer his Gascon claims to Edward. Henry was so anxious for the marriage to take place that he willingly abandoned elaborate preparations already made for Edward's knighting in England, and agreed that Alfonso would knight Edward before the wedding took place.

The young couple married at the monastery of Las Huelgas, Burgos on 1 November 1254. Henry III took pride in resolving the Gascon crisis so decisively, but his English subjects feared that the marriage would bring Eleanor's kinfolk and countrymen to live off Henry's ruinous generosity. Several of her relatives did come to England soon after her marriage. She was too young to stop them or prevent Henry III paying for them, but she was blamed anyway and her marriage was unpopular. Interestingly enough, Eleanor's mother was spurned in marriage by Henry III and her great-grandmother, Alys of the Vexin, was spurned in marriage by Richard I. However, the presence of more English, Franks and Norman soldiers of fortune and opportunists in the recently reconquered Seville and Cordoba Moorish Kingdoms would be increased thanks to this alliance between Royal Houses, until the advent of the later Hundred Years War when it would be symptomatic of extended hostilities between the French and the English for Peninsular support.

#### Second Barons' War

There is little record of Eleanor's life in England until the 1260s, when the Second Barons' War, between Henry III and his barons, divided the kingdom. During this time Eleanor actively supported Edward's interests, importing archers from her mother's county of Ponthieu in France. It is untrue, however, that she was sent to France to escape danger during the war; she was in England throughout the struggle. Rumors that she was seeking fresh troops from Castile led the baronial leader, Simon de Montfort, to order her removal from Windsor Castle in June 1264 after the royalist army had been defeated at the Battle of Lewes. Edward was captured at Lewes and imprisoned, and Eleanor was honorably confined at Westminster Palace. After Edward and Henry's army defeated the baronial army at the Battle of Evesham in 1265, Edward took a major role in reforming the government and Eleanor rose to prominence at his side. Her position was greatly improved in July 1266 when, after she had borne three short-lived daughters, she finally gave birth to a son, John, who was followed by a second, Henry, in the spring of 1268, and in 1269 by a healthy daughter, Eleanor.

#### Crusade

By 1270, the kingdom was pacified and Edward and Eleanor left to join his uncle Louis IX of France on the Eighth Crusade. Louis died at Carthage before they arrived, however, and after they spent the winter in Sicily, the couple went on to Acre in Palestine, where they arrived in May 1271. They gave birth to Edward II.

The crusade was militarily unsuccessful, but Baibars of the Bahri dynasty was worried enough by Edward's presence at Acre that an assassination attempt was made on the English heir in June 1272. He was wounded in the arm by a dagger that was thought to be poisoned. The wound soon became seriously inflamed, and an English surgeon saved him by cutting away the diseased flesh, but only after Eleanor was led from his bed, "weeping and wailing."

Later storytellers embellished this incident, claiming Eleanor sucked poison from the wound, but this fanciful tale has no foundation. They left Palestine in September 1272 and in Sicily that December they learned of Henry III's death (on 16 November 1272). Edward and Eleanor returned to England and were crowned together on 19 August 1274.

#### Queen consort of England

Arranged royal marriages in the Middle Ages were not always happy, but available evidence indicates that Eleanor and Edward were devoted to each other. Edward is among the few medieval English kings not known to have conducted extramarital affairs or fathered children out of wedlock. The couple were rarely apart; she accompanied him on military campaigns in Wales, famously giving birth to their son Edward on 25 April 1284 in a temporary dwelling erected for her amid the construction of Caernarfon Castle.

Their household records witness incidents that imply a comfortable, even humorous, relationship. Each year on Easter Monday, Edward let Eleanor's ladies trap him in his bed and paid them a token

ransom so he could go to her bedroom on the first day after Lent; so important was this custom to him that in 1291, on the first Easter Monday after Eleanor's death, he gave her ladies the money he would have given them had she been alive. Edward disliked ceremonies and in 1290 refused to attend the marriage of Earl Marshal Roger Bigod, 5th Earl of Norfolk; Eleanor thoughtfully (or resignedly) paid minstrels to play for him while he sat alone during the wedding.

That Edward remained single until he wed Marguerite of France in 1299 is often cited to prove he cherished Eleanor's memory. In fact he considered a second marriage as early as 1293, but this does not mean he did not mourn Eleanor. Eloquent testimony is found in his letter to the abbot of Cluny in France (January 1291), seeking prayers for the soul of the wife "whom living we dearly cherished, and whom dead we cannot cease to love." In her memory, Edward ordered the construction of twelve elaborate stone crosses (of which three survive) between 1291 and 1294, marking the route of her funeral procession between Lincoln and London. (The story that the name "Charing" is from the French *chère reine* or "dear Queen" is mere legend, as is the name's supposed derivation from "char ring," allegedly referring to a circular roadway in which the nobles' carriages (chars) waited while their owners attended court. The name Charing is found for that part of London in the 1250s and probably existed long before that.)

However, only one of Eleanor's five sons survived childhood and, even before she died, Edward worried over the succession: if that son died, their daughters' husbands might cause a succession war. Despite personal grief, Edward faced his duty and married again. He delighted in the sons his new wife bore, but attended memorial services for Eleanor to the end of his life, Marguerite at his side on at least one occasion.

#### Popularity

Eleanor is warmly remembered by history as the queen who inspired the Eleanor crosses, but she was not so loved in her own time. The English saw her as a greedy foreigner. Walter of Guisborough preserves a contemporary poem:

*"The king desires to get our gold/the queen, our manors fair to hold..."*

John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury warned Eleanor that her activities in the land market caused rumor and scandal across the realm. Eleanor's often aggressive acquisition of lands was an unusual degree of economic activity for any medieval noblewoman, let alone a queen: between 1274 and 1290 she acquired estates worth above £2500 yearly. In fact, Edward himself initiated this process and his ministers helped her. He wanted the queen to hold lands sufficient for her financial needs without drawing on funds needed for government. One of his methods to help Eleanor acquire land was to give her debts Christian landlords owed Jewish moneylenders; she foreclosed on lands pledged for the debts. Association with the unpopular moneylenders further blighted her reputation.

Peckham also warned of the outcry against her officials' demands upon her tenants. On her deathbed, Eleanor asked Edward to name justices to examine the officials' actions and make reparations. The surviving proceedings from this inquest do reveal a pattern of ruthless exactions, often without the queen's knowledge. She righted such wrongs when she heard of them, but not often enough to prevent a third warning from Peckham that many in England thought she urged Edward to rule harshly. In fact Edward allowed her little political influence, but her officials' demands were ascribed to her imagined personal severity, which was used to explain the king's administrative strictness. In other words, the queen was made to wear the king's unpopular mask. It was always safer to blame a foreign-born queen than to criticize a king, and easier to believe he was misled by a meddling wife. Eleanor was neither the first queen nor the last to be blamed for a king's actions, but in her case the unsavory conduct of her own administration made it even easier to shift such blame to her.

### Limited political influence

Contemporary evidence shows clearly that Eleanor had no impact on the political history of Edward's reign. Even in diplomatic matters her role was minor, though Edward did heed her advice on the age at which their daughters could marry. Otherwise she merely bestowed gifts on visiting princes or envoys. Edward always honoured his obligations to Alfonso X, but even when Alfonso's need was desperate in the early 1280s, Edward did not send English knights to Castile; he sent only knights from Gascony. In England, Eleanor did mediate disputes of a minor nature, but only with Edward's consent and only with the help of ranking members of his council. Edward was prepared to stop her if he felt she had gone too far in any of her activities, and expected his ministers to do likewise.

If she was allowed no effective official role, Eleanor was an intelligent woman and found satisfying outlets for her energies. She was an active patroness of vernacular literature, with scribes and an illuminator in her household to copy books for her. Some of these were apparently vernacular romances and saints' lives, but Eleanor's tastes ranged widely. The number and variety of new works written for her show that her interests were sophisticated. On Crusade in 1272, she had *De Re Militari* by Vegetius translated for Edward. After she succeeded her mother as countess of Ponthieu in 1279, a romance was written for her about the life of a supposed 9th century count of Ponthieu. In the 1280s, Archbishop Peckham wrote a work for her to explain what angels were and what they did. In January 1286 she thanked the abbot of Cerne for lending her a book--possibly a treatise on chess known to have been written at Cerne in the late thirteenth century--and her accounts reveal her in 1290 corresponding with an Oxford master about one of her books.

The queen was a devoted patron of Dominican Order friars, founding several priories in England and supporting their work at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. Not surprisingly, Eleanor's piety was of an intellectual stamp; apart from her religious foundations she was not given to good works, and she left it to her chaplains to distribute alms for her. She patronized many relatives, though given foreigners' unpopularity in England and the criticism of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence's generosity to them, she was cautious as queen to choose which cousins to support. Rather than marry her male cousins to English heiresses, which would put English wealth in foreign hands, she arranged marriages for her female cousins to English barons. Edward strongly supported these endeavors.

### Death

In the autumn of 1290, news reached Edward that Margaret, the Maid of Norway, heiress of Scotland, had died. He had just held a parliament at Clipstone in Nottinghamshire, and continued to linger in those parts, presumably to await news of further developments in Scotland. Eleanor followed him at a leisurely pace as she was unwell with a feverish illness, probably a quartan fever first reported in 1287. After the couple left Clipstone they travelled slowly toward the city of Lincoln, a destination Eleanor would never reach.

Her condition worsened when they reached the village of Harby, Nottinghamshire, less than 10 miles (16 km) from Lincoln<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>. The journey was abandoned, and the queen was lodged in the house of Richard de Weston, the foundations of which can still be seen near Harby's parish church. After piously receiving the Church's last rites, she died there on the evening of the 28th of November 1290, aged 49 and after 36 years of marriage. Edward was at her bedside to hear her final requests.

### Procession, burial and monuments

The tomb of her viscera at Lincoln Cathedral.

Edward followed her body to burial in Westminster Abbey, and erected memorial crosses at the site of each overnight stop between Lincoln and Westminster. Based on crosses in France marking Louis IX's funeral procession, these artistically significant monuments enhanced the image of Edward's kingship as well as witnessing his grief. The "Eleanor crosses" stood at Lincoln, Grantham,

Stamford, Geddington, Northampton, Stony Stratford, Woburn, Dunstable, St Albans, Waltham, Westcheap, and Charing - only 3 survive, none in entirety. The finest is that at Geddington. All 3 have lost the crosses "of immense height" that originally surmounted them; only the lower stages remain. The Waltham cross has been heavily restored and to prevent further deterioration, its original statues of the queen are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The Waltham and Northampton crosses have been moved to locations different from their original sites.

The monument now known as "Charing Cross" in London, in front of the railway station of that name, was built in 1865 to publicise the railway hotel at Charing station. The original Charing cross was at the top of Whitehall, on the south side of Trafalgar Square, but was destroyed in 1647 and later replaced by a statue of Charles I.

In the thirteenth century, embalming involved evisceration. Eleanor's viscera were buried in Lincoln Cathedral, where Edward placed a duplicate of the Westminster tomb. The Lincoln tomb's original stone chest survives; its effigy was destroyed in the 17th century and replaced with a 19th-century copy. On the outside of Lincoln Cathedral are two statues often identified as Edward and Eleanor, but these images were heavily restored and given new heads in the 19th century; probably they were not originally intended to depict the couple.[1]

The queen's heart was taken with the body to London and was buried in the Dominican priory at Blackfriars in London. The accounts of her executors show that the monument constructed there to commemorate her heart burial was richly elaborate, including wall paintings as well as an angelic statue in metal that apparently stood under a carved stone canopy. It was destroyed in the 16th century during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Eleanor's funeral took place in Westminster Abbey on 17 December 1290. Her body was placed in a grave near the high altar that had originally contained the coffin of Edward the Confessor and, more recently, that of King Henry III until his remains were removed to his new tomb in 1290. Eleanor's body remained in this grave until the completion of her own tomb. She had probably ordered that tomb before her death. It consists of a marble chest with carved moldings and shields (originally painted) of the arms of England, Castile, and Ponthieu. The chest is surmounted by William Torel's superb gilt-bronze effigy, showing Eleanor in the same pose as the image on her great seal.

#### Legacy

Eleanor of Castile's queenship is significant in English history for the evolution of a stable financial system for the king's wife, and for the honing this process gave the queen-consort's prerogatives. The estates Eleanor assembled became the nucleus for dower assignments made to later queens of England into the 15th century, and her involvement in this process solidly established a queen-consort's freedom to engage in such transactions. Few later queens exerted themselves in economic activity to the extent Eleanor did, but their ability to do so rested on the precedents settled in her lifetime.

#### Historical reputation

Despite her unpopularity in her own day, Eleanor of Castile has had a positive reputation since the 16th century. The antiquarian William Camden first published in England the tale that Eleanor saved Edward's life at Acre by sucking his wound. Camden then went on to ascribe construction of the Eleanor crosses to Edward's grief at the loss of an heroic wife who had selflessly risked her own life to save his. Historians in the 17th century and the 18th century uncritically repeated Camden's information wholesale, and in the 19th century the self-styled historian Agnes Strickland used Camden to paint the rosier of all pictures of Eleanor. None of these writers used contemporary chronicles or records to provide accurate information about Eleanor's life.

Such documents became widely available in the late 19th century, but even when historians began to cite them to suggest Eleanor was not the perfect queen Strickland praised, many rejected the

correction. Only in recent decades have historians studied queenship in its own right and regarded medieval queens as worthy of attention. These decades produced a sizeable body of historical work that allows Eleanor's life to be scrutinized in the terms of her own day, not of the 17th or 19th centuries.

The evolution of her reputation is a case study in the maxim that each age creates its own history. If she can no longer be seen as a paradigm of queenly virtue, her career can now be examined as the achievement of an intelligent and determined woman who was able to meet the challenges of an exceptionally demanding life.

#### Children of Queen Eleanor and King Edward I

1. Daughter, stillborn in May 1255 in Bordeaux, France.
2. Katherine, (before June 17, 1264 - September 5, 1264) and buried at Westminster Abbey.
3. Joan, born January 1265, buried at Westminster Abbey before September 7, 1265.
4. John, (13 July 1266 - August 3, 1271) at Wallingford, in the custody of his granduncle, Richard, Earl of Cornwall. Buried at Westminster Abbey.
5. Henry of England, (before 6 May 1268 - October 16, 1274).
6. Eleanor, (18 June 1269 - 29 August 1298). Buried 12 October 1298. She was long betrothed to Alfonso III of Aragon, who died in 1291 before the marriage could take place, and in 1293 she married Count Henry III of Bar, by whom she had one son and one daughter.
7. Daughter, (28 May 1271 Palestine - 5 September 1271). Some sources call her Juliana, but there is no contemporary evidence for her name.
8. Joan of Acre (April 1272 - April 7, 1307). She married (1) in 1290 Gilbert de Clare, 7th Earl of Hertford, who died in 1295, and (2) in 1297 Ralph de Monthermer, 1st Baron Monthermer. She had four children by each marriage.
9. Alphonso, born 24 November 1273, died 19 August 1284, buried in Westminster Abbey. He is sometimes accorded the title "Earl of Chester" by modern popular writers, but there is no contemporary evidence that that title, or any other, was ever conferred upon him.
10. Margaret Plantagenet, (15 March 1275 - after 1333). In 1290 she married John II of Brabant, who died in 1318. They had one son.
11. Berengaria, (1 May 1276 - before 27 June 1278), buried in Westminster Abbey.
12. Daughter, died shortly after birth at Westminster, on or about 3 January 1278. There is no contemporary evidence for her name.
13. Mary, (11 March 1279 - 29 May 1332), a Benedictine nun in Amesbury, Wiltshire (England), where she was probably buried.
14. A son, born in 1280 or 1281 who died very shortly after birth. There is no contemporary evidence for his name.
15. Elizabeth of Rhuddlan, (7 August 1282 - 5 May 1316). She married (1) in 1297 John I, Count of Holland, (2) in 1302 Humphrey de Bohun, 4th Earl of Hereford & 3rd Earl of Essex. The first marriage was childless; by Bohun, Elizabeth had ten children.
16. Edward II of England, also known as *Edward of Caernarvon*, (25 April 1284 - 21 September 1327). In 1308 he married Isabella of France

## Eleanor of Castile (d. 1290)

Eleanor of Castile was the first wife of Edward I. She died at Harby, Nottinghamshire and Edward raised the 'Eleanor Crosses' at the points where the funeral procession rested on its journey to Westminster. Three monuments were raised over Eleanor's remains: as above at Westminster; at [Lincoln](#) (containing her entrails), of which only the tomb chest remains; and at Blackfriars, London (containing her heart) which was totally destroyed at the Dissolution.

*Master William Torel* of London cast the beautiful gilt-bronze effigy. Her right hand once held a sceptre. The pillows and the top of the tomb are covered with the castles of Castile and the lions of Leon. The metalwork was finished by *William Sprot and John de Ware*. Around the top is a Norman-French inscription which, on translation, reads:

*Here lies Eleanor, sometime Queen of England, wife to King Edward, son to King Henry, and daughter of the King of Spain and Countess of Ponthieu, on whose soul may God in His pity have mercy. Amen.*

The woodwork was carried out by *Master Thomas de Hokyntone*. However the canopy, which was painted by *Master Walter of Durham*, has been replaced.

On the ambulatory side (not shown) is a iron grille by *Master Thomas of Leighton Buzzard*.

The Purbeck marble tomb chest is by *Master Richard of Crundale*. The shields hung on branches of trees bear the arms of England, Castile quartering Leon and Ponthieu.

Below the chest, and visible from the ambulatory, is a painting (perhaps by *Master Walter of Durham*) of Sir Otes de Grandison (who rescued Edward in the Holy Land and who died in 1328) kneeling before the Virgin and Child and four pilgrims praying before the Holy Sepulchre

